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INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Activities undertaken for the International Decade of
the World's Indigenous People

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Introduction

1. The International Decade of the World's Indigenous People was proclaimed by the General Assembly, in its resolution 48/163 to begin, on 10 December 1994. In its resolution 49/214, the Assembly adopted the short-term programme of activities for 1995. In its resolution 50/157, the Assembly adopted the proposed programme of activities for the Decade, giving emphasis to the role of international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, the environment, development, education and health; and by its resolution 51/78, the Assembly decided to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-second session the item entitled "Programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People".

2. One of the objectives of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People is the adoption of the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people, which is currently under discussion in a working group of the Commission on Human Rights. Another objective is the possible establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system to serve as a permanent arena for indigenous people to discuss matters of interest to them with Governments and contribute to the promotion of peace and prosperity, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. A further objective of the Decade is education as an important means for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people, as well as the promotion and protection of the human and historical rights of those people.

3. In resolution 1997/32, the Commission on Human Rights recommended that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights assume responsibility for coordination of the Decade and requested her to submit an update of the Secretary-General's annual report to the Commission at its fifty-fourth session under the agenda item entitled "Indigenous issues".

I. ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN 1997

4. The Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly on the programme of activities for the Decade (A/52/509) covers the implementation of activities until 30 September 1997; accordingly, additional information on activities for the Decade carried out during the last three months of 1997 is hereby submitted to the Commission on Human Rights.

5. The working group established in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1995/32 to elaborate a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people met for the third time from 27 October to 7 November 1997. There was broad participation by representatives of governments, non-governmental organizations and 123 duly authorized indigenous organizations (see E/CN.4/1998/106). At its third session the working group adopted two articles for the draft declaration by consensus at first reading. Substantial progress has been made and there is consensus on many of the draft declaration principles.

6. Pursuant to Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities resolution 1996/37 of 29 August 1996 and Commission

on Human Rights decision 1997/112, the first Technical Meeting on the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People was held at the United Nations Office at Geneva in March 1997.

7. The meeting was attended by the Special Rapporteur on the study on the protection of the heritage of indigenous people, Mrs. Erica-Irene Daes and by representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Its conclusions and recommendations (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1997/15, paras. 26-37) were, inter alia, as follows:

(a) The Technical Meeting on the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People was considered very important and useful by all participants. It is important that agencies and bodies of the United Nations system coordinate and harmonize their efforts in relation to the protection of the heritage of the world's indigenous people;

(b) The study of the draft principles and guidelines on the protection of the heritage of indigenous people elaborated by the Special Rapporteur constitutes a valuable contribution to the protection of indigenous cultural and intellectual property. The Special Rapporteur will continue to collect information for the report which she will submit annually to the Sub-Commission and to the Commission on Human Rights. It is emphasized that the heritage of indigenous cultures should not be destroyed.

8. The Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People was established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 49/214 with the purpose of financing projects and programmes during the Decade and strengthening international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people. In conformity with General Assembly resolution 50/157, an advisory group of the Fund was established to assist the Coordinator for the Decade.

9. Between 1 January and 30 November 1997, the Voluntary Fund received contributions from the following Governments: Canada (4 March 1997), US\$ 10,799; Denmark (7 January 1997), US\$ 168,186; Fiji (9 January 1997), US\$ 3,000; Greece (3 June 1997), US\$ 3,000; Japan (31 March 1997), US\$ 50,000; and Sweden (14 August 1997), US\$ 61,633. Generous contributions were also made by the following non-governmental organizations: Alliance of Taiwan Indigenous Culture (22 October 1997), US\$ 300; and Intuition Music, Inc., DBA Sequoia records, US\$ 550 (in 11 monthly instalments). Appreciation is expressed to the contributors to the Fund for the Decade, and the importance of increasing contributions to enable more activities to be carried out jointly with indigenous people is emphasized.

10. The fellowship programme for indigenous people at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights offers six-month fellowships in Geneva which include training and practical work on human rights and on the United Nations system. The first group of fellows received training from 1 June to 31 December 1997. The results are very satisfactory, both for the fellows and for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights;

lessons have been drawn from the first group's experience and this will be of great benefit for indigenous people and the future development of its programme.

11. On 10 and 11 November 1997 an inter-sessional meeting was held with three members of the Advisory Group of the Voluntary Fund for the Decade, who had attended the third session of the working group on the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people. The Advisory Group made an evaluation of the fellowship programme and considered fellowship applications for 1998. The Group heard the views of the fellows and of the staff in the Office of the High Commissioner responsible for the programme. Taking into account the various assessments of the fellowship programme for indigenous people, it recommends that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continue the programme in conformity with General Assembly resolution 50/157.
12. The deadline for 1998 applications was 1 September 1997. The Advisory Group considered a total of 94 applications for the fellowship programme from 34 countries and agreed to recommend that the High Commissioner award fellowships from 1 June to 31 November 1998 to four applicants from the following indigenous organizations: American Indian Movement of Colorado, United States of America; Ngai Tahu Maori Law Centre Inc., New Zealand; Association des Femmes Réfugiées de Azawad, Burkina Faso; and Kuna Youth Movement, Panama.
13. The fellowship programme enters its second year of operation with the selection of the above four fellows from four regions of the world ensuring a gender balance: in 1997 three of the fellows were male and one female, and in 1998 three are female and one male; all of them having extensive experience of working in their respective organizations. The possibility of increasing the number of fellowships is being explored with institutions and Governments wishing to co-sponsor the programme with the United Nations by funding their own fellows under the established selection procedure. This indicates that the fellowship programme for indigenous people in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights may be expanded.
14. In its resolution 1996/34, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities recommended that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights organize a workshop of indigenous journalists, with the participation of appropriate departments of the United Nations and other relevant institutions and persons, in order to improve dissemination of information about the United Nations and its activities relating to indigenous people. In its resolution 1997/15, the Sub-Commission expressed its appreciation to the Government of Spain for its offer to host a workshop of indigenous journalists in Madrid at the beginning of 1998.
15. The Office of the High Commissioner arranged, in consultation with the Government of Spain, for the workshop to be held in Madrid from 26 to 28 January 1998. The workshop is intended to provide an opportunity for indigenous journalists working in the mass media to meet and discuss a variety of problems focussing on three areas of concern: How can indigenous issues be dealt with in the mainstream media? How can the indigenous media -

newspapers, radio and television - be developed and strengthened? What is the role and responsibility of the indigenous media as an intermediary between the international community/United Nations and indigenous communities?

16. The Voluntary Fund for the Decade will defray the travel and subsistence expenses for 12 indigenous professional journalists from various the world; other indigenous journalists, competent United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations will also participate. In all, 50 media professionals will attend the workshop.

17. A workshop to discuss the implementation of article 8 (j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity in relation to indigenous people was held from 24 to 28 November 1997 in Madrid. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights cooperated, through its representative, in preparing and organizing this important meeting.

18. Discussions between representatives of indigenous people and Governments on article 8 (j) of the Convention addressed the issue of the important contribution of the knowledge of indigenous people to protecting biodiversity for the benefit of mankind, as well as the benefits to be derived by indigenous people from the right to protection of such knowledge. The workshop will propose to the Conference of the Parties various options for a programme of work to implement article 8 (j) and other related articles, together with suggestions for a possible body or working group to ensure participation by indigenous people in future work.

19. The first meeting of the Advisory Group of the World Health Organization (WHO) indigenous peoples and substance use project was held in September 1997 in New York; the project's aim is to prevent or minimize the risks of and damage relating to psychoactive substance use, mainly among indigenous communities. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was invited to participate in the meeting.

20. At its first meeting the Advisory Group identified the project's goals and the need to set up an indigenous team for the project within the WHO structure and the possible implementation of six pilot projects in the following indigenous communities: (i) Anka Hill Tribe, Thailand; (ii) Masai community, Kenya; (iii) Tonga community, Tonga; (iv) Chechua community, Argentina; (v) Chukotkan community, Siberia, Russian Federation; and (vi) Miskito community, Nicaragua. A training workshop for persons engaged in these projects will be held in February 1998 in New Zealand. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights supports this international effort by indigenous people in the sphere of health and would be prepared to participate therein in view of its experience of working with indigenous people within the United Nations system.

Non-governmental organizations

21. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was invited to participate in a meeting organized by the Kanak indigenous people of New Caledonia in the Pacific region, in September 1997. The participating delegate reported to the meeting on United Nations activities in respect of indigenous people, and in particular on the work of the Working Group on

Indigenous Populations, the Working Group elaborating a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people and the programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. The meeting of the Kanak people helped to encourage indigenous participation from this region in the work of the United Nations system with indigenous people.

22. At the fifteenth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, in July 1997, the indigenous delegates present decided to set up a committee on indigenous health to ensure that health remains a priority issue on the Working Group's agenda and that indigenous people are involved in the development of indigenous health initiatives and policies. The Committee submitted its first report to the High Commissioner in October 1997.

23. The Advisory Board of the International Training Center of Indigenous Peoples (ITCIP) met from 5 to 8 December 1997 at Copenhagen and decided that the first ITCIP training course for indigenous people would take place in the summer of 1998 at the Katuaq Cultural Centre in Nuuk, Greenland. ITCIP has the support of the Board of Katuaq Cultural Centre, Greenland Home Rule, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Ford Foundation and representatives of indigenous organizations and human rights specialists.

24. As part of the celebrations of the Swiss National Day on 1 August 1997 the Geneva City Council held an open-air reception in the evening for indigenous participants at the fifteenth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. At the ceremony, gifts were exchanged and welcoming speeches and expressions of gratitude to the Geneva authorities were made before a large local audience. The ceremony coincided with the twentieth anniversary of the first conference of non-governmental organizations on discrimination against indigenous people, held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva in September 1977. On that occasion, 20 years ago, the indigenous delegations had also been received by the then Mayor of Geneva.

25. At the fifteenth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, in the context of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and under the aegis of the Government of France, the pupils of the Parc Bellevue school in Marseilles organized a major exhibition of photographs of the Dakota indigenous people of the United States of America, taken during a cultural visit to the Dakota people by pupils from the school. The exhibition was highly appreciated by the participants in the Working Group as it reflected the schoolchildren's interest in the culture and rights of indigenous people.

II. FINAL COMMENTS

26. Governments and indigenous organizations are invited to continue making significant progress and achieving consensus on the principles of the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people as one of the objectives of the Decade.

27. Gratitude is expressed to the contributors to the Voluntary Fund for the Decade and the importance of increasing contributions in order to undertake

more activities jointly with indigenous people is emphasized. It is important for indigenous people that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should continue the fellowship programme for indigenous people, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 50/157, together with the other programme activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

28. The importance of supporting and strengthening the project being implemented by the World Health Organization among indigenous communities is emphasized as one of the aims of international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, the environment, health, development and education.

29. The importance of the principles and guidelines for the protection of the heritage of indigenous people (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1995/26, annex) and of preventing the destruction of that heritage is underscored.

30. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations will focus at its sixteenth session in July 1998 on the topic "Indigenous peoples: education and language", and invites experts in this field to participate and share their valuable experience for the benefit of indigenous people and society as a whole.

31. It is suggested that the actors involved in the Programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, particularly governments, indigenous organizations, non-governmental organizations and other participants, should submit annual information on their activities during the Decade to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and assess the progress of the Decade. At present, little information in this respect is being received.
